a progressive Canadian newsmagazine

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BRIARPATCH

Volume 33 Number 5 June 2004 $3.00

Improve your Relationship with the Earth Mother!

Queer Culture: Big, Bright and Bold! Check it Out!

GENUINE CANADIAN MAGAZINE



Eco Tips ✤ Monsanto ✤ Great Sand Hills ✤ Gay Rights ✤ Secret Trials

El Salvador ✤ Colombia ✤ Trade Agreements ✤ Privatization

0411

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COVER
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Radical Cheerleaders express their support through humourous chants and songs at the last Gay Pride Parade in Regina.

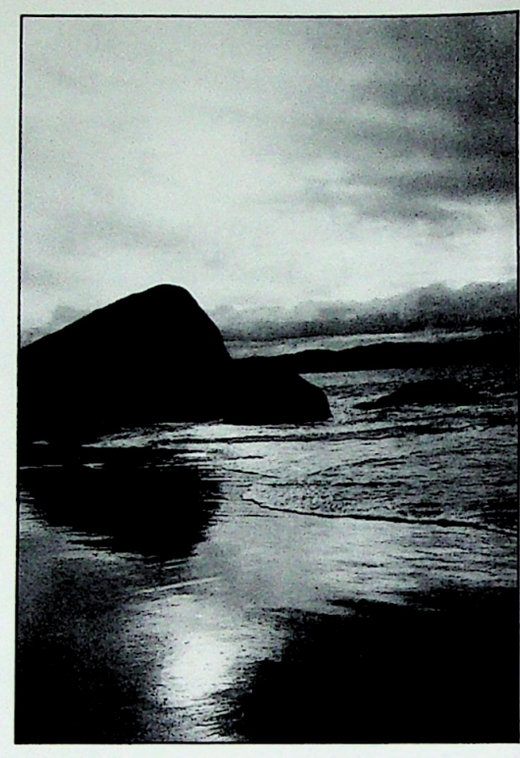
OPENERS

ART RAFFLE

Wow! Some of you have already sold all of your tickets and got them in to us for our annual fundraiser art raffle. Thank you!

This beautiful, tranquillity-inducing, framed nature photo is one of our prizes. It was generously donated by Theresa Wolfwood of Victoria, BC.

If you still have tickets, please keep in mind that the draw date is June 30. Hope to hear from you soon!



GARAGE SALE

Just a reminder that it's not too late for spring cleaning, or for giving your space a Feng Shui rearrangement to improve the vibes. Bring us all the stuff that's cluttering your physical or mental environment and we'll find a home for it.

And if you're in need of more stuff, come to the sale on June 12 at 2138 McIntyre St., Regina. We're still hoping for the donation of a gently used office chair... hint, hint.

COALITION OF THE WILLING

We have had a couple of inquiries lately from people making their wills, wanting to include Briarpatch as a beneficiary and needing to know our details.

To include Briarpatch in your will, the following language can be used: "I hereby give and bequeath the sum of $ ____ (or alternatively, ___ % of my estate) to Briarpatch Inc., whose address is 2138 McIntyre St., Regina SK, Canada S4P 2R7." Have your lawyer contact us at 306- 525-2949 if more information is needed.

Your planned gift can help ensure that you are contributing to the good fight for a long, long time. Long live our very generous subscribers and supporters! VIVA!

GAY PRIDE PARADE

The LGBT community in Regina is hoping that unions (please bring banners), and individual friends and supporters will join them on June 12 for a fun day of festivities. The parade will leave the Legislative Building at noon and is expected to arrive in Victoria Park at around 12:30 where there will be entertainment.

FAHRENHEIT 9/11

Michael Moore is really pushing buttons this time! His latest film, Fahrenheit 9/11, was a must see at the Cannes Film Festival. It's rumoured that the contents will guarantee the demise of the Bush regime with its shocking footage from Iraq - if the American people get to see it. Disney, who helped fund production, are now trying to block distribution of the film until after the election!

Moore was able to smuggle camera crews into Iraq for "imbedded" coverage of the real situation, and interviews that expose the true sentiments of USA soldiers about being there. He was expecting to have a bit of trouble getting into Iraq, but says it was as easy as getting off a plane in any other American city - passports weren't even checked.

Briarpatch is Saskatchewan's independent alternative newsmagazine committed to building a socialist democratic society. We provide a forum for disadvantaged peoples and support progressive movements working to change unjust structures and build a genuine political and economic democracy. We support peace, equality, democracy, social justice, Aboriginal self-determination, and the protection of the environment. We oppose the oppression of people on the basis of nation, class, race, gender, ability, and sexual orientation.

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You Said it!



ODE TO MARTIN

Dear Briarpatch,

I enclose some "poetic" thoughts on Paul Martin that express my opinion of our new Prime Minister.

So - Mr. Martin

So - you're going to change our whole world, Mr. Martin
Our old ways aren't the path you wish to tread
Our Parliament must be more democratic
We all must be involved, that's what you said.

So - what is this new democracy, involvement?
Will your Ministers be open, Grand Mere free?
No more shielding people like Radwansky?
That's what "level with Canadians" means to me.

So - will your Cabinet restore the Health Care funding?
Education, Social Services, so much more?
Will you redress the poverty and homelessness
You caused by gutting to the bone in '94?

So - will your budgets end the tax cuts for the wealthy?
Thirty billion in their pockets just last year
Will the rich now pay some income tax, as we do?
They've paid little on your watch, that's very clear.

So - will Canadian Steamships fly the Maple Leaf now?
Will you pay fair wages to Canadian crews?
Will you bring Head Office back here from Barbados,
And pay Canadian taxes, as we all do?

So - can the leopard change his spots now, Mr. Martin?
Can you really step out from your corporate towers?
Can you truely empathise with "common folk" now?
Or is all this Image Making - PR power?

So - it's true there's need for great change, Mr. Martin,
But it's not to integrate for more "Free Trade."
The change Canadians need most, Mr. Martin
Is in what *you've* done since the Red Book Masquerade.

Phil Bladen
Preeceville, SK

ELECT HOME BUILDERS

Dear Briarpatch,

It's a good thing to maintain some awareness of the recent government contributions to the housing mess, particularly with an election probably in the offing. One thing that often escapes notice is the (uhmm) flexibility of levels of assistance.

Although early Public Housing often used rents for assisted tenants based on up to 30 percent of income, by the late 60s this had stablized at 17.9-25 percent, which was the rule for programs in the era of the Non-Profit program authorized by the National Housing Act. Of course, by the late 70s inflation had made the upper end of the scale the rule.

In the USA, the Reagan administration slid their rate up to 30 percent. In the early 80s, fiercely independent thinkers at CMHC headquarters, who would never follow a trend simply because it was fashionable, began using this 30 percent of income level. When asked (pointedly), they assured all and sundry that the purpose was solely to measure the need, not to set the assistance level. Needless to say, 30 percent became the new assistance level by the end of the 80s. Soon after, there were mentions in CMHC research literature that perhaps a better measure of

housing need was 50 percent of income (this seems to have mercifully died).

There is a large difference between 30 percent as a criterion to measure need and 30 percent as a rule for setting actual rent. One is academic, useful for setting budgets, the other can determine whether junior gets nutrition or empty calories.

There needs to be a Housing program, but some attention has to be paid to how it is designed and its effects on those it's (nominally) aimed at. Just throwing money may end up being very expensive help, mainly to the benefit of developers and landlords while keeping poor households alive, but just that.

As Asaf Rashid points out in the May issue of Briarpatch, the definition of "affordable" can be pretty loose. A better target might be to encourage delivery methods that minimize the requirement for profit while delivering housing at prices that leave enough money to lead a decent life. This means that, while the actual builder may get a profit, using direct government mortgage lending (rather than a bank mortgage) would be preferable, as would the many non-profit housing groups (rather than for-profit landlords).

Anyhow, it should be an election issue, but will probably get hopelessly deformed.

Rod Manchee
Ottawa, ON

Prairie Pride Chorus
Regina's Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgendered Choir

presents

Watershed Stories

the stories continue

a new choral work
composed by David L. McIntyre

7:30 PM Saturday, June 12, 2004
St. Paul's Cathedral
Admission $12.00

Tickets available from Choir members or call 545-1986

HOMOPHOBE LIFESTYLE

Dear Briarpatch,

The general proliferation of hate-talk and hate-mail demonizing homosexuals reminds me that hate-mongers never cease; such is the right of free speech.

It seems that the homophobes draw their righteous persecution from religious teachings. Regardless of which God one worships (or chooses, like me, to simply respect Mother Nature sans dogma), it seems crazy to take the word of men (they do the actual verse-making in the various books, oracles and Bibles). What is with these men of dogma? Why do they persecute minorities, in this case homosexuals?

As a self-educated empiricist, I understand homosexuality to be a natural reality. Though homosexuals are a minority (between five and ten percent of the world's population), they are nevertheless a part of Mother Nature's mix; her eco-system.

To persecute homosexuals or any minority, is to echo Hitler's insanity. Hatred for no reason but institutionalized prescribed scripture is sick. Get help.

Finally, the term "homosexual lifestyle" is a fallacious misnomer. Those who snowmobile enjoy a snowmobiler's lifestyle; lifestyle is a choosing. Being homosexual is not a choosing; it is a born reality just like heterosexuality is a born reality. Those who use the term "homosexual lifestyle" misrepresent the truth; they employ language as a nasty device to mislead the gullible amongst us.

Mendelson Joe
Emsdale, ON

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Easy Solutions to Major Problems

Four Regina people share tips on how you can improve your relationship with the Earth while enhancing your quality of life.

by Nichole Huck

Every day thousands of people across Regina do their part to make the world a better place. One man is providing the community with healthy local food, a woman is making reusable diapers, a university student is starting a campaign encouraging people to buy locally, and a 62-year old man is recycling computers. These people don't know each other, but they do know that everything they do to support their community or to help the environment will make their city a better place to live.

THE FUTURE OF COMPUTERS IS NOT THE PITS

Computer junk is literally piling up in Regina's landfill every day because consumers don't know what to do with their electronic waste. But a Regina business is hoping to change this.

John Duncan was one of the first people in Regina to build computers and now 20 years later, his company is quickly becoming a leader in the field of electronic waste recycling. The home of e-Waste Canada is a graveyard of computer monitors, towers and keyboards just waiting to be demanufactured, and either sent off to be recycled or to be rebuilt by local youth into functional computers.

Duncan encourages Regina people to drop off obsolete or irreparable computers at his business, promising that absolutely nothing goes to the landfill or gets shipped to another country. "Canada is known to be a tremendous violator of sending electronic waste overseas. There is a province in China where children are burning wires to separate the metal, and polluting the air and environment as a result," says Duncan. Since they began accepting old computers last October, e-Waste Canada has diverted over 5,000 computers from the Regina landfill, but Duncan says that is nowhere near what is actually being discarded. He estimates Regina people dump about 20,000 monitors each year, each containing 4.5 pounds of lead.

In February, a provincial government news release said Saskatchewan residents throw out more than 1,100 tonnes of old electronic equipment each year, containing hazardous material including mercury, lead and cadmium that cause health and environmental problems if not disposed of properly."

David Forbes, Minister of Environment, acknowledges that, "computers and other e-waste are a real problem," but admits the government has only recently started consultations on the possibility of establishing a province-wide program to recycle old computers. "We are looking at the possibility of people paying an environmental handling charge fee when they buy any kind of electronic product," says Forbes. He points to SARCAN centres as potential drop off depots for electronic waste. The new regulations are scheduled to come into effect in 2005.

But Duncan does not want people to wait until next year. "If it can't be resold or refurbished, it needs to be recycled. We don't just remove and resell the valuable parts and ship the waste to the landfill. All of it is dealt



photos: Debra Brin

"If it can't be resold or refurbished, it needs to be recycled. We don't just remove and resell the valuable parts and ship the waste to the landfill. All of it is dealt with responsibly." - John Duncan

with responsibly," says Duncan. He currently sends the glass from the monitors to a smelting factory in New Brunswick where the lead is extracted to make batteries. The plastic is sent to Calgary to be made into plastic wood and decking, and the steal is sent to IPSCO to be made into pipe.

In 1997, the average life span of a computer was four to six years. By 2005 the average life span of a computer is expected to be only two years. Duncan says it is important that consumers of computers and other potential e-waste think ahead when they buy. He suggests buying a computer that can be easily upgraded. Many of the upgradeable computers he sells are made by Saskatchewan young people who come in after school and on weekends to learn hands on about computers.

Over 500 million computers and other electronic equipment will become obsolete over the next five years making e-waste the fastest growing source of waste. This does not surprise Victor Chang at the department of Environment. "Almost everyone I talk to has two or three computers or televisions in their garage or basement. Many people are just waiting and hoping there will be a solution for their e-waste."

But Regina people no longer have to wait. E-Waste Canada, located at 1231 Broad Street, accepts computers and other electronic waste free of charge. For furthur information vist www.eWasteCanada.ca .

BUY LOCAL

The provincial government is concerned that many of Saskatchewan's youth are leaving to find better job opportunities elsewhere. They are so concerned in fact, that they spent millions of dollars on the "Our Future is Wide Open" campaign designed to encourage youth to stay in Saskatchewan. But, 23-year-old Brett Dolter offers a different solution.

"Young people are leaving Saskatchewan because they don't see opportunities here. It's simply poor planning that removes the opportunities for young people to be active and creative entrepreneurs in their community, and replaces them with opportunities to be underpaid check-out clerks," says Dolter.

Dolter plans on working with other people in the community to create a Regina city business alliance. His vision is to make it a non-profit organization whose goal

is to shift community culture to support the core of locally owned business.

"If we do business within our community we'll begin to know members of our community. By knowing members of our community we'll care about our community, and by becoming more self-reliant, we will increase our ability to enact caring environmental and social policies without the threat of becoming uncompetitive in the global marketplace," says Dolter.



Dolter, a student of Resource Management and Environmental studies at UBC, says the problem is that current economic development strategies in Regina focus on attracting investment into community and increasing exports out of the community. "Money earned in export industries is typically spent on products from outside the region, like computers from China," says Dolter, "But if residents buy locally we can substitute locally produced goods for imports."

> **"I'm working to create a buy-local campaign with the idea that if we do business within our community then we'll care about our community, and by becoming more self-reliant we increase our ability to enact caring environmental and social policies" - *Brett Dolter***

Dolter says there are many benefits to buying locally. "When we buy locally we slow the flow of profits, jobs and opportunities out of our community and more local funds are available for investment back into the community." He is concerned that communities around the world are becoming too dependent on their participation in the global marketplace. "A strong local business community can more effectively lobby for proactive planning by local governments, the end of preferential treatment for corporate chains, and an increased public awareness of the benefits of locally owned business such as enhanced community spirit and cohesion," says Dolter.

He is also concerned about the social and environmental effects of big box stores in Regina. "We are currently seeing the doughnut effect. Large, sprawling big-box developments are built on the outskirts of the city and downtown businesses lose their clientele. Sprawling big box retail, such as the developments we see in the east and north west areas of Regina, increase reliance on private automobiles, which in turn leads to greater costs to the environment as fossil fuels are burned and green house gases are released," says Dolter.

Dolter says there are no limits to what could be bought or sold, but stresses "businesses that chose to get involved in the project will commit to upholding certain standards of quality in the way they treat their workers and the environment, and the well-being of customers. Local sweat-shops are not invited!"

Mayor Pat Fiacco's "I love Regina" campaign instilled a sense of pride in Regina people, but Dolter hopes the "buy local" campaign will create a sense of community among people in Regina. "If we begin raising awareness about the importance of local business we also raise awareness to the fact that, yes we do all live in Regina, and yes I am a member of this community, and this is a wonderful thing!"

WE'VE COME A LONG WAY BABY!

Big things come in small packages, and small things can create big waste. So, when 34-year-old Michelle Wall became a mother last year, she decided to do her part to help the environment by using cloth diapers. Wall, a former biology professor at the University of Manitoba, has a Bachelors degree in microbiology and a Masters degree in botany, but now she is taking time off to raise her 11-month-old son.

"My background in science has given me an awareness of the environmental impact of disposable diapers, and the whole idea of all that feces going into a landfill doesn't appeal to me," says Wall. "Once I had a kid, I really started thinking about all this stuff, so I did research on the internet." She found single use disposable diapers are the largest non-recyclable component of household garbage, creating one tonne of garbage per year per child.

Wall was the last one in her group of friends to have a child. Many of them had tried cloth diapers and some did not like them, but she thought there had to be a better way. Armed with some polar fleece, Velcro and a sewing machine, she set out to make a better diaper. After much trial and error she came up with what she calls "Bugalug" diapers. They have a soaker pad with a top layer of polar fleece that takes moisture away from the baby's bottom, and they are flap style to reduce drying time.

After much encouragement from her friends, Wall realized the flannel print diapers she created for her son could be sold to other parents. Last fall she perfected the



"I really don't find it takes a lot of time out of your day to throw a load of laundry in. The whole child rearing industry is geared towards use once, throw away and be done with it." - Michelle Wall

pattern and now they are available in three children's stores in Regina, as well as online.

In addition to being better for the environment, Wall says they are economical, "We save a lot of money - even if you take into account the cost of laundering, it's nowhere close." She suggests minimizing energy usage by line-drying the diapers instead of using the dryer.

Over 4 million disposable diapers are discarded in Canada per day because most parents think cloth diapers are time consuming. Wall disagrees, "I really don't find it takes a lot of time out of your day to throw a load of laundry in. The whole child rearing industry is geared towards use once, throw away and be done with it."

Wall says there is a lot parents can do to save money and help the environment. She shops at consignment stores in Regina for things like toys, car seats and safety gates. "Hopefully none of that stuff ends up in a landfill. You use it for such a short period of time that most of the stuff is practically new."

Walls knows how busy parents can be so she offers some advice. "You can't do everything, but you can do as much as you are comfortable with, and hopefully you help make the world a better place."

For more information on the Bugalug diapers visit: www.bugalugs.ca or stop by Cozy Cradle or Kids' Trading Company in Regina.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Rick Morrell owns and operates Eat Healthy Foods, an organic food store in the Cathedral area of Regina. His mission is to provide high quality locally grown or imported organic foods and other ethical products at prices competitive with mainstream grocers. Like most people in businesses, he hopes to make a profit - but unlike most of those in business, he plans on using the profits to hire local activists and artists, and support them by providing free room and board in exchange for their contribution of 20 hours a week into the community.

The 40-year-old has a Bachelor of Science in biology. For years he worked in Regina on projects to help the environment until he, "started getting disillusioned by the fact that the people with money - like government or industry - will never fund the real work. The real work is to change the value system of society. Things that are detrimental to the environment and exploit people must be made illegal or unacceptable,



"Our mission is to provide high quality, locally grown, chemical free food at prices competative with mainstream grocers. This enhances markets for local producers, helps to encourage sustainable farming practices and contributes to stabilizing the local economy." - Rick Morrell

legislatively or otherwise.

"As an environmentalist you have to have money to pay your rent, and I was one of the people responsible for generating projects that could pay our expenses while we were doing this stuff," explains Morrell. He was reluctant to start a business because "there was this idea among my environmentalist friends that when you put yourself in a position to benefit economically from something, your credibility becomes suspect because you might be doing it for the money and not for the cause, but I figured if anyone could do this without getting corrupted it would be me."

> "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world, it is indeed the only thing that ever has."
>
> *-Margaret Mead*

Morrell started the store because friends would often come to his house for meals and ask where they could get the same kind of food. He would give them the numbers of the people he bought the food from, but they would never actually form their own relationships with the producers. "People wanted the food, but they wanted to just show up and get it, so they asked me to start a store."

Morrell says people chose to shop at his store for a variety of reasons. "Some want the healthiest food possible, some want to support the community, some want to support the environment, and some just like the fact that the food tastes better than anywhere else."

He says there are many benefits to buying locally. "Local stuff is freshest, and it doesn't involve the same amount of transportation and fossil fuel use or wear and tear on vehicles and roads. Local markets tend to be better in terms of delivering more money directly to the producer and less to the transportation companies, wholesalers and middle people."

Most of the products on the shelves at Eat Healthy Foods are from local suppliers. Morrell has formed ongoing relationships with preferred suppliers for things like chickens (Abernathy), wild boar and fish (Prince Albert), rolled oats (Kamsack), and organic produce (Qu'Appelle, Craven). "The producer receives 72 percent of the price paid by the consumer. If you shop at the mainstream supermarket chains, the farmer is lucky to see 10 percent of your money," says Morrell.

In addition to farmers seeing more money, Morrell says buying locally helps people in Regina. "If you make it a religion to buy locally, you are making a commitment to your community and you are participating in perpetuating the life of that community," says Morrell.

BE PART OF THE CHANGE

These are only four people out of the thousands in Regina whose individual actions are part of a larger movement to better the world by bettering their community. So next time you bike instead of drive, or buy locally, or walk the extra distance to the recycling bin, remember you are part of something much larger, something that is starting at the grassroots level and is gaining momentum in communities across Canada. Something we can all be part of.

Nichole Huck is a journalism student at the University of Regina.

Back Away from Our Wheat

Monsanto takes a Thrashing

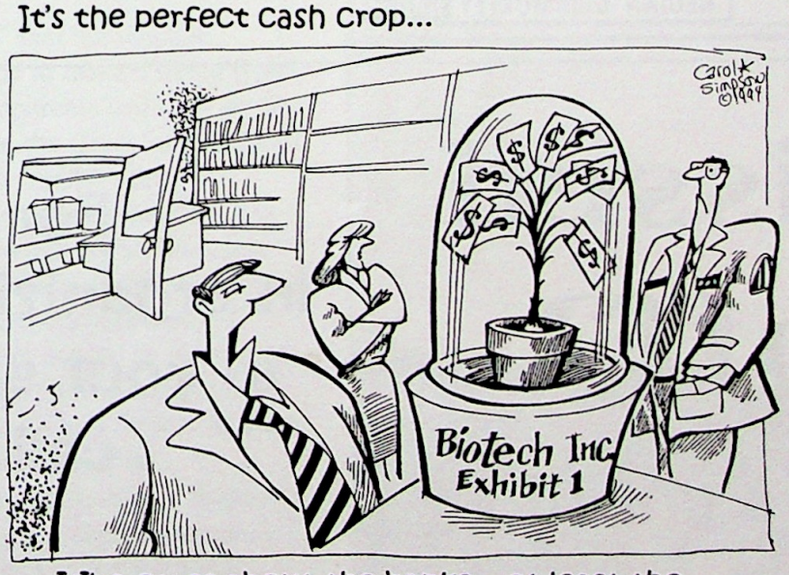
by Paul Beingessner

Farmers from Minot to Meadow Lake breathed a sigh of relief recently as Monsanto announced it will discontinue efforts to introduce Roundup Ready wheat in North America. The seed and chemical giant bowed to pressure from a wide range of farm groups, who have been reacting to growing opposition from wheat buyers and consumers.

Monsanto had applied to register Roundup Ready wheat in both Canada and the USA, but has come under ever-increasing fire. In Canada, many farm groups, including the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB), vigorously objected to the registration process itself. They cited the need to take into account the market impacts Roundup Ready wheat would have, in addition to the environmental and agronomic factors that are routinely assessed.

A recent salvo in the battle was fired by an unlikely source - G. Allen Andreas, the CEO of agribusiness giant Archer Daniels Midland. In an interview with Reuters news agency, Andreas warned Canadian farmers that they might not want to be the pioneers in pushing a product the world's consumers do not want.

For many opponents of Roundup Ready wheat, the argument is that simple. Eighty-seven percent of the CWB's customers require guarantees that the wheat they are buying is not genetically modified. Since there is currently no way to control the spread of Roundup Ready wheat into conventional varieties, introducing it is equivalent at this time to losing those markets.



Given this, many farmers cannot understand why our varietal registration process does not protect farmers from potential economic disasters. It did at one time. The economic impacts of releasing a variety were once part of the consideration in the process. The federal government eliminated that, apparently to pave the way for Roundup Ready wheat, which Agriculture Canada was developing for Monsanto.

Some supporters of the biotech industry had forecast a chill on wheat research if Monsanto bowed to the pressure. In truth, though, wheat research in Canada and the USA relies little on techniques of genetic engineering. Monsanto's efforts in wheat research in the past have focused largely on transferring Roundup resistance into existing wheat varieties. Monsanto's pattern is to take varieties developed with public money (as are virtually all important wheat varieties in Canada) and insert the Roundup Ready gene into them. Having done so, Monsanto is able to claim ownership of the entire amended variety and its offspring.

While the various sides argue the good and bad about Monsanto's announcement, the issue for Roundup Ready wheat is rather simple. Not only do customers not want it, but farmers do not need it. Weed control systems in wheat are as well developed as the crop itself. When farmers look at the technology fee charged by Monsanto, and the requirement to buy new seed each year, they quickly realize that the benefits of Roundup resistance are minimal to wheat growers. They certainly are not enough to overcome the huge disadvantage of losing your best customers to countries wise enough not to succumb to Monsanto's pressure.

Acceptance of genetically modified food crops has had little success of late. GM flax, potatoes and tomatoes have all been pulled from the market due to customer resistance and farmers' pressure. Monsanto has pulled the plug on GM canola in Australia, as one state after another banned it. In Britain, Bayer Crop Science gave up attempts to commercialize GM maize.

This is not to say that research in GM crops will stop, but until that research actually yields something of unique value to farmers, they are not likely to support such efforts.

Paul Beingessner is a writer, ag consultant and third generation farmer at Truax, SK.



Pissed off?

Call a union!

For help in organizing a union in your sweatshop call CEP

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Communications Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada

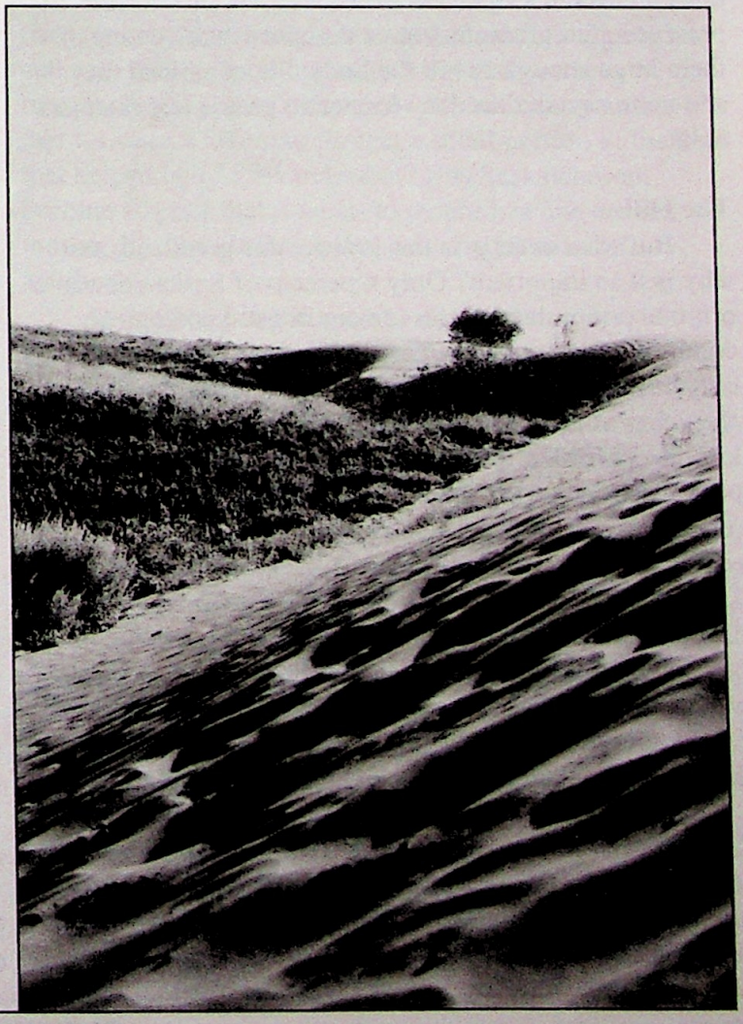
Are Saskatchewan's Great Sand Hills for sale?

The gas hunters are drawn to this fragile eco-zone because of the ease of extraction... unless someone gets in their way.

by Joe Schmutz and Alan Appleby

"If its not asking for too much," said the rancher politely, "we'd like to continue to make a living from ranching as our parents, grandparents and their parents did." The woman was referring to the Great Sand Hills of southwestern Saskatchewan. This 59,000 square kilometer sand hill landscape was created some 10,000 years ago by glaciers, water and wind. Now the area is part of a larger grassland region which, from a bird's-eye-view, appears L-shaped and tucked into extreme southwestern Saskatchewan. There is only 20 percent of this once great ecosystem left. The Great Sand Hills include the tallest sand dunes in southern Saskatchewan, some of which are still fleeing from the wind.

What was at stake, and what prompted the woman's presentation, was pressure from gas interests to further develop natural gas deposits in the Great Sand Hills. These gas deposits can hardly be crucial to the provincial economy. There are 27 trillion cubic meters of natural gas reserves already on inventory in Saskatchewan, of which the Great Sand Hills' portion is only a small part. The issue is the strategic location of the gas field, and its internal properties. The field is located close to the Alberta border and the Trans Canada Highway, and is already crossed by national natural gas pipelines. This makes it both easy to access and easy to get to market. In addition, the sandy terrain is relatively easy to operate on, that is, if you aren't too concerned about impact on the environment. The gas layer is shallow, easy to access and



photos: Debra Brin

sweet (not "sour" with sulfur dioxide and other noxious gases). The gas deposits are seen by many in the industry as offering a quick return on investment at a comparatively high margin, given the depletion of many other shallow gas deposits these days.

The Risk

For the ranching industry, it's another story. Development of multiple access roads and trails, with the necessary additional fencing, directly destroys the native prairie and creates barriers to the movements of animals. Ranch costs increase as cattle have to be moved from area to area, and extra time is spent on fence maintenance and out of the way travel to gate access. New water sources may be needed in cut off pastures. Ongoing gas-field access and traffic bring noise, odours, chemicals and invasive plants to the area. Gas well drilling and maintenance directly impact the landscape, taking significant areas out of native cover. Pipeline construction from wells, as collectors and for regional and national flow, increase environmental impacts over a wide area. Accidental releases of gas and other fluids and chemicals are to be expected, with breaching of pipelines, malfunctioning equipment and human error.

Ultimately the former wild prairie may become a grid of roads, fences and pipelines which in aggregate can consume about 10 percent of the area. As the woman presenter put it, "death from a thousand cuts" - none of them large enough to kill the body, but combined they add up to severe disability for native prairie and ranchers alike.

The Hills

But what exactly is this prairie, this grassland, and why is it so important? Only 4 percent of Saskatchewan's original prairie landscapes remain in good ecological condition. This prairie occurs in less than 1200 parcels, only 192 of which are larger than 10 square kilometers. Very few of these remaining areas are over 1000 square kilometers in size, and fewer yet are protected as native prairie ecosystems. The Great Sand Hills are the largest remaining area of protected native prairies in good ecological condition in Canada. Currently there are only 1,971 square kilometers of land protected from gas development in the Great Sand Hills, barely over 3 percent. The story of how at least these lands came to be protected underlines the commitment of the ranching community to maintain healthy native prairie grass for their own and their children's livelihood.

In 1990, as gas development encroached on the Great Sand Hills, conflicts arose between the ranching community and the gas development companies. Provincial regulations were not up to the task of properly protecting this sensitive resource of native prairie. Under pressure from the public, the Province undertook the development of The Great Sand Hills Land Use Strategy, released in 1991. While this strategy only promised to protect 36.5 sections (95 square kilometers) of land in four separate areas, it did contain a recommendation for the formation of a district planning authority under The Planning and Development Act. The Great Sand Hills Planning District Commission was formed in 1993 by the four rural municipalities of the area.

By 1998, after extensive discussions involving government, industry and environmentalists, a development plan and zoning by-laws were unanimously adopted by the four municipalities and approved by the Province. Under this plan, prime protection increased to include 1,179 square kilometers where no gas development is allowed, and 793 square kilometers where strict environmental restrictions apply. The community had spoken. From Saskatoon, Regina, Swift Current, and most strongly from the ranching community of the Great Sand Hills, people had clearly established what they thought was a reasonable balance between gas development, environmental protection, and the ongoing heritage of ranching on native grass.

Conservation

The rancher mentioned earlier was right about the long ranching tradition with a colourful beginning in southwestern Saskatchewan. After the last bison were eradicated in the 1880s, cattle were driven north into Saskatchewan from the United States to utilize the excellent Canadian range that had just received ample rest. Some of the employees of the big southern ranches stayed on and established their own spreads. They settled in coulees and river valleys where permanent water and wild hay grew and could sustain them year-round.

The ranchers of today's Great Sand Hills and those before them have proven for over 100 years that ranching can be sustainably practiced. Recent studies in the USA have shown that the biodiversity on some traditional ranches is as high or higher than on many wildlife areas specifically managed for conservation at public expense. Not only do the Great Sand Hills' ranchers maintain an ecosystem that provides clean water and air, they also grow wholesome food without most of the environmental costs common in concentrated methods of beef production. The continued practice of a valued way of life should be an inalienable right, especially since the people involved are also providing a great service for the rest of us.

Fragile - Handle with Care

Why all the fuss about plant and soil disturbance from trails, roads, pipelines and gas leaks? Soil scientists call the soils of the Great Sand Hills regosols - young

soils on this geologically unstable landscape. These fragile soils - if one can call it soil - are there because of the blankets of vegetation with a tenuous root-hold on life. Great Sand Hills' soils lack the distinctive dark appearance that indicates rich organic matter and nutrients, like the chernozems and rich clay or gumbo soils (vertisols) that made Saskatchewan wheat famous.

In the Great Sand Hills, organic matter or nutrients not held by the blanket of vegetation are carried into the deep sandy abyss or the next quarter section. If this blanket of vegetation is broken, the root-hold is gone, sand starts to flee again and weedy plants invade. One too many cattle hoofs or a half-ton truck's tire - not to mention well drilling equipment - can easily break this precarious balance.



Our unique prairie grasslands are disappearing as the fragile covering of vegetation is disturbed. Today only about four percent remains healthy.

If surface disturbance was not enough, there is another crux for both the ranching and gas industry, the sandy abyss below. Most of Saskatchewan's countryside is dotted with ponds and lakes, held as a cup by the confining soil layer below and beside. In the sand hills, this confining layer exists 5-20 meters below the surface. The water in the bottom layers of the sand and just above the confining layer tends to be clean as it has been amply filtered by our sandy glacial heritage. As a result, a simple windmill often suffices to lift water for sand hill residents.

However, because the sand is so permeable, a surface spill or leak in a well will spread. Therefore, what happens to groundwater at one spot can easily affect the aquifer at another. Zoning the land to protect the sand hill ecosystem is akin to zoning our body - agreeing to take blood only from the little toe.

The gas industry in Canada is regulated and has improved technically to reduce environmental damage. In the Great Sand Hills, however, these beneficial practices are simply not enough. When a well is drilled, the assumption is that it can be capped to guide the gas under pressure into pipes, recompression plants and the like. Because the sand is so easily permeable to both water and gas, gas escapes over a much larger area than expected in clayey soils.

Seepage

Some ranchers found that water became unusable after seismic testing alone. How confident can anyone be that a pipe will be sealed into the clay layers even only 10 meters below ground? If a seal is successful, what assurance can anyone give that it will remain sealed for two, five or ten years? Should we care today about the physical and economic health of the Great Sand Hills and its residents in100 years? If a mishap does happen, who will step up to restore the aquifer, and at what cost? How can we prove that blood taken from a toe caused the heart to fail?

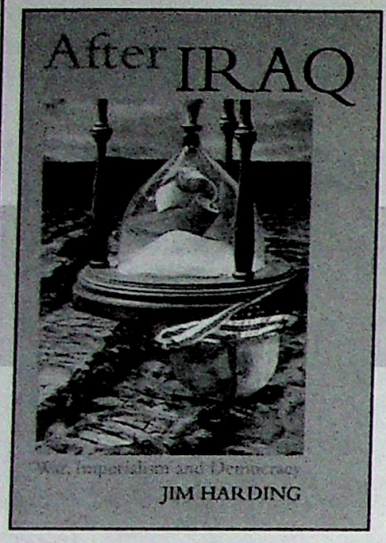
Saskatchewan is known as a Prairie Province. Indeed over a third of Saskatchewan is prairie, and it makes up more than half of Canada's grassland ecosystems. But only about four percent of Saskatchewan's prairie - that once nourished untold generations of aboriginal peoples, and now four generations of farmers and ranchers - remains healthy. Are we so poor in both money and spirit that we cannot afford to protect a small portion of the land that helped build Saskatchewan? Has Saskatchewan become so poor that it needs to jeopardize one proven industry for the elusive and short-term promise of another?

At one point in the not-too-distant future we collectively need to shift away from natural gas as a source of energy. If by then we lose the communities that created this province, their natural environments and rural lifestyles, it will be a great shame. If we sell them to the highest bidder of the day, it will be a tragedy.

Alan Appleby is the Conservation Director with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), Saskatchewan Chapter. He has also served as Saskatchewan Coordinator for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Endangered Spaces Campaign, and has held senior management positions in the Saskatchewan government in parks, land use planning, and resource management.

Joe Schmutz, Ph.D, is the Community Conservation Planner for Saskatchewan's Important Bird Areas program and an Adjunct Professor in the Division of Environmental Engineering, University of Saskatchewan.

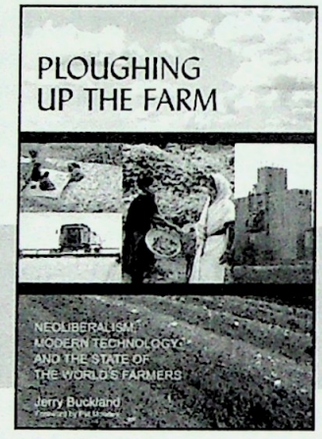
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Marriage According to the Bible



As the religious right thump the bible in righteous indignation over the expansion of the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples, we should take a close look to see just what the bible has to say on the topic. If the bible is used by our lawmakers as a source of guidance for their decisions, then our society should prepare for some major upheavals. Some new laws could look like this:

Marriage shall consist of a union between one man and one or more women. (Genesis 29:17-28, II Samuel 3:2-5)

Marriage shall not impede a man's right to take concubines in addition to his wife or wives. (II Samuel 5:13, I Kings 11:3, II Chronicles 18:21)

A marriage shall be considered valid only if the wife is a virgin. If the wife is not a virgin, she shall be stoned to death. (Deuteronomy 22:13-21)

Inter-faith marriage is forbidden and punishable by death. (Numbers 25:1-9, Ezra 9:12, Nehemiah 10:30)

If a married man dies without children, his brother shall marry the widow. If he refuses to marry his brother's widow or deliberately does not give her children, he shall be killed, or perhaps just pay a fine of one shoe and endure some name-calling. (Genesis 38:6-10, Deuteronomy 25:5-10)

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Someone You Love is Gay

Inclusive legislation has stirred up the high volume homophobes, which has silenced many of the oppressed and their supporters.

by Chelsea Looysen

As we fight for the recognition of same-sex couples and protection under anti-harassment laws, the backlash makes the struggle look quite daunting for people who have been oppressed on the basis of their sexual orientation. Homophobia is woven so tightly into the social structure that challenging its legislation is a very difficult battle.

When the same-sex marriage debate became widespread throughout Canada, Canadians for Equal Marriage, a grassroots organization with chapters all over Canada, took the lead. They have developed a broad-based national campaign that is aimed at ensuring that the voices of lesbians and gays are heard. Founded by Egale Canada and the Metropolitan Community Church, the organization is leading the national fight for equal marriage and securing fundamental rights for lesbians and gays. Their campaigns are also designed to confront the backlash that has arisen from those opposed to recognizing same-sex couples.

Canada is a country divided by hatred and fear fuelled by the build up to the federal election. Demanding rights for an oppressed group often results in defensive reactions by some of those who are privileged enough to have those rights. Focus on the Family (Canada), a conservative, right-wing fundamentalist organization, announced this spring that they are fundraising for a planned $1.5-million national media ad campaign in support of "traditional" marriage. They see the coming election as "a tremendous opportunity to raise awareness of the value and significance of marriage, its incomparable benefits to society." This means that for many, same-sex marriage will be the issue that decides how they vote in the upcoming federal election.

Oppression for Votes

The success of some politicians running in an election relies on the presence of homophobia. Many politicians in Canada and the United States have openly admitted that they are more concerned with votes than granting equality to gays and lesbians. Bush recently called on Congress to approve a Constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages. Many see this as an election tactic to appeal to conservative groups and motivated solely by the goal of becoming re-elected.

Backlash

While the issue at hand is same-sex marriage, the underlying issue is much larger; the acceptance of gays and lesbians in our community. Lesbians and gays live in fear of being harassed, physically attacked or even killed if they are open about their sexual orientation. Since their freedom to live their lives is limited by this reality, Bill C-250, the Canadian anti-hate legislation bill, will protect gays and lesbians from extreme hate propaganda.

Ignorance and fear has bred backlash to this attempt at equality. Dr. Charles McVety, president of both the Canada Family Action Coalition and the Canada Christian College, published a recent news release stating that, "Bill C-250 passed just in time to silence



Radical Cheerleaders show their support at the very colourful and lively 2002 Gay Pride parade in Regina.
photo: Debra Brin

opposition to same-sex marriage during the election." He is urging "all Canadians not to vote for Members of Parliament who passed this new law." He is also concerned that, "many citizens may take heed to the threat of incarceration and not express their positions in public discourse."

Another example of backlash occurred on April 17, 2004. A rally was organized on Parliament Hill to protest *against* this Bill, arguing that it criminalizes the expression of opinions against homosexual behaviour. That people would call on Parliament to prevent the protection of a vulnerable group demonstrates how far we are from true equality.

The Cost of Homophobia

Homophobia causes preventable health problems and increased health care costs. In 2001, Gay & Lesbian Health Services of Saskatoon released a study that looked at the economic impact of homophobia in Canada. They found that homophobia costs Canada at least $8 billion a year in increased health care costs and loss of productivity. Other studies have shown alarmingly high rates of suicide, substance abuse, depression, low self-esteem, school drop-out, and unemployment in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. In a study conducted by The Institute for Social Research at the University of Saskatchewan, it was revealed that as many as 5,500 Canadians die premature deaths each year as a result of homophobia. These deaths are due to the stressors of living in a homophobic environment and a society that devalues the lives of LGBT people.

Silencing

The fear of homophobic retaliation keeps many LGBT people silenced, which perpetuates inequality, and many policies are in place to keep them silent. For example, most daily newspapers will not publish anonymous letters to the editor. If members of an oppressed group wish to address inequality, they are forced to have their name in print if they want to be heard. Even someone who has been "out" for a number of years may harbour legitimate fears of possible repercussions that could follow, given the recent

On April 29, Bill C-250 received Royal Assent and became law, adding "sexual orientation" to the Criminal Code's hate propaganda provisions. Religious opponents mounted an intense campaign against the bill, claiming that it would criminalize the expression of opinions against homosexual behaviour. However, only those who seek to promote the most vile forms of hatred and violence are affected. - *Egale*

reactions to struggles for equality.

Another silencing factor associated with homophobia is the fear of being included in the backlash. Saskatchewan teens have identified that they are afraid to be friends with gay peers as they too become targets of harassment. Many same-sex parents hide a great deal of their lives to prevent their children from being ostracized by other children. Lesbians and gays who are teachers, coaches, clergy members and many other professions remain closeted for fear of losing their jobs and to avoid harassment. People continue to be treated unfairly based on their sexual orientation despite the presence of laws and collective agreements in place to protect them.

Aside from gays and lesbians, there are many others who are being hurt by the failure to accept LGBT people in our society; it also affects everyone who knows they have a gay family member, friend, teacher, neighbour or care-giver. Someone you love is gay. Homophobia is everyone's issue.

Time for Change

Solutions exist to take action against this inequality. Contact organizations in your area such as PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) or a gay/straight alliance group to build allies. Check out websites for organizations like Egale or Canadians for Equal Marriage to keep informed. At election time, make educated decisions before voting to ensure the politicians will be part of the solution instead of the problem. Walk in your city's gay pride parade - a large percentage of the people in the parades are allies who march for support of their gay brothers and sisters. In Regina alone, there are several events that are organized by the gay community but exist for the larger community: Queer City Cinema 5, Pride Week events, and a concert by Prairie Pride Chorus - to name only a few. Check out queer culture in your city and see it's not much different from any other cultural event. Only when we stand together will we make our society more understanding of the issues facing gays, lesbians and other oppressed people.

This is everyone's struggle. Our culture is far more tolerant and accepting than mainstream media would have us believe. Much of the fear of accepting gays and lesbians is based on a lack of knowledge and fear of being included in the backlash. We need to listen critically and question homophobic remarks and actions, such as those taken by Focus on the Family or the arguments linking equality for LGBT to limiting the freedom of expression. Until same-sex couples are legally permitted to marry, until anti-hate legislation is not only passed but widely recognized, homophobia will remain a disease of our culture. Future studies will continue to show the high incidence of premature deaths of LGBT people. Suicide will remain a solution considered by many troubled LGBT youth. Fear of homophobic retaliation will prevent us from making allies and lifting the shroud of ignorance from our oppressors. Is this the world we want for our future generations?

37 percent of gay and lesbian youth felt like outsiders at school

Nearly two-thirds often hear homophobic remarks by other students

46 percent have tried suicide at least once.

- from a McCreary Centre Society study conducted in BC in 1999

Chelsea Looysen is the administrator for Briarpatch *and sits on the Board of Directors. She is actively involved with several LGBT groups including Lavender Social Club and Prairie Pride Chorus.*

For more information, check these websites: Egale at www.egalecanada.ca , *and Canadians for Equal Marriage at* www.equal-marriage.ca .

Canadian Justice System in Solitary Confinement

by Matthew Behrens

As Toronto City Council considers the latest request for new police funding, councillors wondering whether the extra millions are really necessary might consider staging a small demonstration to see where those taxpayer dollars are really going.

Recently we went to the Metro West Detention Centre, the jail one judge refers to as Canada's Guantanamo Bay, for a Saturday morning vigil and walk, and were met by four squad cars and a representative of the Metro Police Counter-Intelligence and Anti-Terrorism Squad. The event was planned to be a few speeches, some songs, a walk behind the jail, then a two kilometer trek with the families of Toronto's disappeared.

Nonetheless, we were glad to have an anti-terrorism expert on hand, and informed him that our ultimate destination that day was the neighbourhood terrorist, Northrop Grumman Canada, a major producer and procurer of the tools of terror. We asked him to investigate the fact that the men who form the management structure there are responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people around the globe, while five Muslim men - against whom no public allegation has ever been proven in open court - have spent years behind detention centre walls.

He was a nice enough fellow and asked if we had any other concerns. We told him that members of the Metro Police who had shown up, perhaps to support our cause, would have to remove their guns since it was a nonviolent walk, and that we also had concerns about racial profiling and other incidents of repression in the community.

He thanked us for being frank with him and said he had to head downtown to "monitor" the health care rally. Perhaps they thought they might find a sleeper cell or two amongst the raging grannies and others who were demanding an end to the privatization of health care.

Meanwhile, members of the families of Mahmoud Jaballah, Mohammad Mahjoub and Hassan Almrei had arrived and we gathered in a circle to hear their latest news. All had been in Ottawa with friends and families of secret trial detainees Adil Charkaoui and Mohamed Harkat not 48 hours before, seeking a meeting with the minister of secret trials, Anne McLellan. They were refused, just as they were refused seven months earlier at the doorstep of the prime minister.

Tired but unbowed, they were out again to make their case. Ahmad Jaballah, an eloquent 17-year-old who has had to take on far too many adult responsibilities in his young life, patiently explained how difficult it has been for his family with their father in jail.

Mona Elfouli, whose husband, Mohammad Mahjoub, has been detained since June, 2000 without charge or bail on secret evidence, told us we have to keep demonstrating for as long as it takes to ensure freedom for the detainees. She pointed out that the families are also in jail, imprisoned by the fear that their loved ones will be deported to torture.

Diana Ralph, Hassan Almrei's adopted Canadian mother, read a powerful statement Hassan had dictated from solitary confinement, where he has spent the past 30 months. Diana had asked Hassan what he wanted to



photo: John Bonnar

One of the little boys kicked in frustration at the fences that separated him from his father. Another said that if they won't let his father out, he wants to go into the jail with him.

tell the government, and he said:

"Tell them that Hassan Almrei isn't the one in segregation. My thoughts are free, and you can't imprison my soul. It's the Canadian justice system which is in prison.

Tell Anne McLellan and Paul Martin, shame on you! You keep talking about civil liberties. You make a big deal about rescuing Maher Arar from one year in solitary confinement without charges in Syria. But I have been held in solitary confinement for two and a half years - in Canada - without any charges. There is no justice here.

I only want the rights guaranteed to all in Canada, the rights guaranteed through international law to everyone in the world. If you have something against us, the Secret Trial 5, if you have proof that we are terrorists, charge us. But you don't have any real evidence against us, just vicious statements made in secret by people you bought off or scared off.

If my lawyer could see the secret evidence and could cross-examine the people who testified against me, it would be obvious that they are lying. But we are not allowed the simple rights that even the lowliest criminal is guaranteed under the Charter of Rights."

The group of about 30 people proceeded to walk down the hill on the east side of the detention centre, banners and signs held high. The chants of "Free the Secret Trial Five, Justice for All" were soon interrupted by an amazing sound. It was the pounding of fists on windows by men in orange jumpsuits that can be heard through the re-enforced glass, concrete, and two sets of fences that separate them from the demonstrators. They were calling out, displaying peace signs and holding the palms of their hands to the windows, much as they do in the visiting area of the jail.

As we reached the south end of the prison fence, two of the littlest children started jumping up and down excitedly. They could see their father, Mahmoud Jaballah. They called over their mother and brothers and sisters and we gathered around to see the smile of Mahmoud Jaballah, who was arrested in 1999 and held for nine months before being released when the first security certificate against him was thrown out as not credible. He has been imprisoned since August, 2001 on secret evidence, despite CSIS admitting they had no new evidence, only a new interpretation of old evidence already dismissed.

It was a hugely emotional moment. There were many tears as the children waved desperately to a man they could not kiss, hug, or touch in any way. One of the little boys kicked in frustration at one of the two perimeter fences that separated him from his father. Another said that if they won't let his father out, he wants to go into the jail with him.

The police began to come down the hill as we prepared to head back up. The chanting started up again, broken only by the incessant pounding on the windows from the prisoners. Many are there on immigration holds, committing no other crime than mistakenly filling out the wrong form, for coming to Canada on a false passport for their own safety, for failing to understand that they must obediently remain under the heel of the immigration bureaucracy at all times if they want to maintain their "liberty" on the streets of this country.

We headed a few kilometers down the road towards the factory of Northrop Grumman Canada, formerly Litton Systems Canada, home of the years-long campaign against their construction of the inertial guidance system for the deadly cruise missile. From that spot hundreds were arrested in the 1980s, 1990s, and recently during the invasion of Iraq.

We pulled up at the entrance to the weapons factory and read out the litany of terrorist actions for which the executives of this corporation are responsible, noting that they are the third largest weapons makers in the world and are currently working on terror from the skies - the Bush-led Star Wars. Northrop Grumman Canada is responsible for:

✈ production of the inertial navigational system and the weapons release computer sets for the F-4 Phantom fighter-bomber, used to deadly effect against the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the 1960s and 1970s.

✈ production of the inertial guidance systems for thousands of air-, land- and sea-launched cruise missiles used extensively to terrorize the people of Iraq and the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Sudan.

✈ development of guidance systems and navigational equipment for the USA F-22, described as the "next-generation air superiority fighter."

✈ production and maintenance of guidance systems and navigational equipment for the RAH-66 Comanche helicopter, described as the "world's most advanced helicopter and the cornerstone of the USA Army's Force XXI aviation modernization plan." Given the fact that most anti-tank munitions are now covered in depleted uranium, we have great concerns about Northrop Grumman Canada supplying technology which is used in nuclear warfare.

✈ production of components for the A-10 Warthog, the depleted-uranium-coated munitions which have been implicated in a sharp spike in the cancer rates of the people of Iraq, the former Yugoslavia, and Puerto Rico.

✈ production of components for the F-16 Fighting Falcon, the USA fighter-bomber which flew more missions than any other aircraft during the 1991 slaughter codenamed "Operation Desert Storm" and during the bombing of the former Yugoslavia.

✈ production of custom cockpit Liquid Crystal Displays (LCD) for the CF18 Modernization Program in Canada. The CF-18 is already a deadly fighter jet, a weapon of mass human destruction described in 1991 by Canadian General Gerard Theriault as having an accuracy which makes "the destructive ability of one CF-18 as great as an attack by hundreds of bombers in World War II."

✈ production of the BAT precision weapon system, designed to bring "unmatched range, accuracy and lethality to the battlefield."

The Northrop Grumman security, who have spent a good half hour taking photographs of the small group from every conceivable angle, continued their note-taking and consultations with police.

As a group of drivers left to get our vehicles from the jail, police approached and ask for Dick Troy.The officer informed Dick that he was in breach of bail conditions. Troy was previously arrested in Montreal, along with hundreds of others, last summer for the crime of standing around during an anti-globalization protest. Released on strict conditions (including not to be at any illegal protest), the police have now picked up a sign that Dick was carrying to put into the car's trunk as "proof" that he was demonstrating, and they take him into custody.

The families of the detainees are shocked that someone who has simply walked from point A to point B in their support is now going behind bars himself. Especially when, after the police have heard the litany of crimes committed by Northrop Grumman Canada executives, they did not go inside the building to arrest the *real* criminals.

I have been held in solitary confinement for two and a half years - in Canada - without any charges. There is no justice here.

The kids all gathered around Dick as he is being searched by the police. Dick flashes a peace sign and the kids respond in kind as he is driven away.

Dick is transported to 23 division, where they inform him that although police considered today's demo legal, there was no telling when it could have lurched into that indescribably dangerous illegal zone. You can never tell when a group might fall to their knees in silent meditation on the lawn of a weapons maker.

Dick was released about an hour later. His arrest was perhaps necessary to justify the comparatively heavy police presence, or maybe to scare the families of the detainees - who are increasingly public figures - into believing that even low-key, nonviolent protest will be dealt with in such an arbitrary fashion.

As the eventful day ended, we reflected on the fact that Hassan Almrei is right. The Canadian justice system, and the much-touted democracy of Canada, are in solitary confinement for yet another season this spring. Almrei has been very clear in what he thinks needs to be done: people need to speak up, to refuse to be afraid, to nonviolently protest these injustices in the fashion of one of his heroes, Martin Luther King, Jr.

King once said in reference to one of the American government's perceived enemies, the Vietnamese people, "We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for victims of our nation and for those it calls enemy, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers and sisters."

And so our task seems pretty clear, eh?

Matthew Behrens is a member of Homes not Bombs and the Campaign to Stop Secret Trials in Canada, which works with people targeted by CSIS under the "security certificate." For more info visit the website at www.homesnotbombs.ca .

How to Steal an Election

by Alison Acker

Election day for a new president in El Salvador, and it all seemed remarkably calm. With an observer team from Common Borders, I spent 15 hours watching Salvadorans who had been killing each other in a civil war only 12 years ago lining up quietly to vote, and even shaking hands. According to the polls, it was anyone's call - a right-wing sports commentator turned business tycoon, or a former guerrilla chief turned leader of the left-wing FMLN.

But I should have known better. The results were out by 7 PM and it was 57 percent to 36 percent victory for the right. The election had been stolen long before I arrived to observe it.

This was my fifth visit to El Salvador as a journalist or observer, and I was admittedly excited about the possibility of a people's victory. Surely the FMLN deserved it after spending the post-war years doing grass-roots work in the community, taking over most of the municipalities and becoming the largest political party in the country.

The right-wing ARENA is the same party created by Col. Robert D'Aubuisson, who is widely believed to have had Archbishop Romero murdered in 1980 and to be responsible for many of the massacres during the civil war. The incumbent president was from the ARENA party and had done little to raise El Salvador out of poverty and unemployment. The FMLN asked the people to "vote for change." The ARENA party told them to "vote for security." As FMLN candidate Shafik Handal put it, "Fear won out over hope."

I did not fully understand that fear until I waded through the newspapers I had accumulated from before election day. Both the two major newspapers, all the TV stations and most radio stations in El Salvador belong to the right wing, and it was the ARENA media that built that fear. Apparently, ARENA spent most of its $55 million election chest on a campaign directed by a Nicaraguan media expert. Positive ads showed ARENA candidate Tony Saca, aged 39, as everybody's favourite uncle, opening a new soccer stadium or kicking the ball for kids. But the negative campaign was much heavier. Daily full-page ads by a mysterious group called "Women for Freedom" pictured the FMLN candidate in the hills, 20 years ago, alongside a kid with a gun and the message, "Is this the education you want for your children." Or there were scenes of destruction blamed on the FLMN, never mentioning the army massacres that caused most of the 80,000 civilian deaths.

Daily full-page ads by a mysterious group called "Women for Freedom" pictured the FMLN candidate in the hills, 20 years ago, alongside a kid with a gun and the message, "Is this the education you want for your children."

I met one woman on election day in the little town of Tamanique who said she had pulled the plug on her TV set because her four-year-old son was crying and saying, "the terrorists are coming to get us."

Besides the ad campaign, there were constant newspaper references to Handal's visits 20 years ago to North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba, as well as to his Russian-born wife. Cold war tactics had worked before. Or there were allegations of FMLN ties to contemporary "terrorists" such as the ETA who were then being cited as responsible for more than 100 deaths in Spain.

A huge weapon was the White House's displeasure at the prospect of a left-wing victory in El Salvador. President Bush had sent his brother, Jed, to warn the voters to stick with an ARENA president - or else. A string of congressmen and envoys were paraded in the press, warning that the White House would find any change a threat to its security - there was talk of a USA air base to be built in El Salvador to counter possible threats from Venezuela or Colombia.

The biggest threat of all was that of deporting many of the nearly two million Salvadorans working in the USA, or restricting or stopping the money they send home. Since these remittances total nearly $2 billion a year, which equals the government's budget, voters were obviously scared. Could they afford to make a change, even if they wanted to?



"With communism the lesson is free. Is this the teacher you want for your children? - Women for Freedom"

Salvadorans are not unaware. I talked to women working in sweat shops who knew all about globalization, and to servers in a doughnut shop who were forced to wear ARENA t-shirts to keep their jobs. They said they wanted to vote for the FLMN but weren't sure it was a good idea.

The results were not only a blow to the Salvadoran people's fight for a better life, but a lesson to all of us that watching for fraud or the mis-counting of votes doesn't guarantee free or fair elections. If the 250 international observers hadn't been there, perhaps the results might have been worse or there could have been more violence - there were only two deaths in the campaign this time, a record for El Salvador. But the three lessons I learned from 14 days there at election time were: fear is stronger than hope; money counts; and the one who counts most is Uncle Sam.

Alison Acker is a retired journalist and English professor who went to El Salvador to monitor the elections this past March as part of Common Borders, a Canadian non-governmental organization. She has written books on Central America, including Children of the Volcano *and* Honduras: The Making of a Banana Republic.

On the Front Lines:

Lessons from Colombia

by Terry Zahorski

The government in Colombia is fascist and reactionary, a regular violator of human rights, and it views unions as blocking "progress." The intent of the government is to liquidate the trade union movement completely in order to wipe out the gains made over the years by labour.

In mid-May, political leaders of the USA and Canada were in Bogota, Colombia negotiating a bi-lateral agreement. Meanwhile, Jorge Alvin Anaya, the treasurer and financial secretary for the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia (CUT), was in Regina as part of a cross-country tour sponsored by three Canadian public sector unions (CUPW, CUPE and PSAC) and the Canadian Labour Congress. The CUT is the largest labour federation in Colombia.



The "Defending Public Services: Canadian and Colombian Workers on the Front Lines" tour provided an opportunity for Colombian trade unionists and activists to talk to members of the three unions, community organizations and the public about their struggles to prevent the privatization of public services, and about the impact of privatization to date on workers, services and communities in Colombia.

Anaya informed that he was here not for charity, but to request the highest form of solidarity from Canadians. This he felt manifests itself in our ability to unite the working class over issues that threaten the gains made by the labour movement, not only here in Canada but internationally as well.

Colombian Security

Over the last 40 years in Colombia, there has been constant fighting between the armed insurgents of the left, the right-wing paramilitary, and guerilla groups. The people of Colombia were at the end of their ropes and demanded a peace process be put in place. Their demands were answered in the form of "Democratic Security," which was the platform of Alvaro Uribe Perez in the last Colombian election. This resulted in his being swept into power on the motto of "Firm Hand, Big Heart." If people spoke out against this, they were seen as terrorists and not in favour of peace.

Uribe has sold the Colombians a bill of goods; that "democratic security" will bring peace to Colombia. What Uribe really needs is to have the economic policies and the military policies mesh; this would achieve his hidden agenda of privatization of the public sector. It is the accepted duty of the trade unions to expose this hidden agenda for all to see. Only then will they have a chance to hold off privatization.

The strategy of the Colombian government is to take away the traditional role of the state (public services), and hand them over to private sector corporations. This is accomplished in a two-fold method. First the government makes large cuts to social spending in both the federal and provincial budgets. This, in effect, removes the responsibility of the state to the people; at the same time any ability of the state to function socially is lost. This opens the door to privatization, where all the services can be sold to the highest bidder. Secondly, an attempt is made to discredit public services and manufacture the situation that they are inefficient and not cost-effective. This provokes an artificial crisis which is used to discredit the unions by placing the blame directly on them for the crisis. An opportunity is then created for the private sector companies to come in and have the public see them as "saving the day" by purchasing the failing public services.

The World Plan

This situation is not limited to Colombia. Throughout the world, private corporations are demanding the right to deliver public services. They are being supported by governments who are pressured to do so by the policies of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). In Colombia, against the backdrop of a prolonged civil war, trade unions are courageously fighting an extremely repressive government which is completely restructuring the Colombian public sector through privatization at the command of the IMF.

In order to make a profit, the private sector companies cut corners that result in reduced services, the creation of user fees, lower wages and benefits for workers, as well as a lack of accountability for these services.



By Robert Fink

The Colombian Method

The neo liberal model for Colombia was first introduced 14 years ago. Pressured by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the model was applied by signing accords between the IMF and the Colombian Government, and then passing massive reforms to laws (labour, taxation and judicial), the governments, and even their Constitution. They could then implement the model by way of a three pronged attack:

- ❒ They "liquidated" the weakest unions in the public sector (railroad, maritime and the banks).
- ❒ They simply went ahead and privatized other public sector areas such as the telecommunications and energy companies.
- ❒ Where the public sector unions had the highest level of resistance (health, education, judicial, oil) they "restructured" those services so that in the future they could privatize them much easier.

In terms of the constant threat of privatization, the Colombian unions and civil society have worked together. The last 14 years have had a huge negative effect on Colombian society and on the workers. About 300,000 workers have lost their jobs and 4,000 trade unionists have been assassinated.

The Reaction

Throughout this, the trade union movement in Colombia has taken on a leadership role by becoming a social agitator. They have been successful in revealing the hidden agenda of their current government, and in changing public opinion. This was never more evident than when the Colombian trade union movement garnered enough support with a huge national protest to defeat a national referendum that was designed to clear a path for privatization.

The National Democratic Coalition (NDC) was created out of this movement and committed itself to defend the working class and civil society. In October of 2003, the NDC managed to get trade union leaders elected to several different levels of government. This was significant because it strengthened the trade union movement and showed civil society that the trade union movement could play a key role in government.

Not only is it important to get Labour leaders into government; it is equally important to hold them accountable to those from where they came. Now, more than ever, the ability to develop policies for the future is a reality. The challenge becomes how to undertake these new ventures without compromising dedication to the working class and civil society.

Economic globalization is the umbrella that trade talk is carried out under. Their program of macroeconomics is to transcend all levels of government in all countries.

To be successful in combating this, a base of interest and commitment must be constructed in the international trade union movement to develop a capacity between workers everywhere to work together to produce strategies on anti-privatization with an international perspective.

Terry Zahorski is a member of the Regina local of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers who realizes the necessity of international solidarity.

Trading Away Our Rights

When our government poses for the cameras while signing yet another trade agreement, the photo doesn't show the complicated web of rules that is preventing us from protecting the things we cherish... like our health, the environment or public services.

by Keith Jeworski

Our national public postal service has a vast network of mail boxes and post offices. A NAFTA ruling, or a settlement by the federal government, could see Canada Post being pulled out of the courier market. Millions could be paid to United Parcel Service (UPS). Or UPS could be given access to Canada Post's network, allowing them to skim off the more lucrative urban markets.

These scenarios could leave Canada Post with less money to provide postal services and jobs.
It is fundamentally wrong that NAFTA could be used to undermine public postal services and jobs without recourse to our courts and without input from the public, workers or Parliament. In fact, appointed trade panelists will hear evidence in a closed hearing and base their decision not on domestic law but on NAFTA rules. Their decision will be binding.

Last August the panel rejected the request of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and the Council of Canadians (COC) for standing as parties to the hearing. They indicated that they would only accept limited written submissions. CUPW and COC are presently pursuing a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of NAFTA rules which allow a foreign corporation to sue governments.

The Challenge

In April 2000, UPS initiated an investor-state challenge against Canada. Their claim was filed under Chapters 11 and 15 of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which was signed between Canada, Mexico and the USA in 1994. Its primary allegation was that Canada Post was engaged in cross-subsidization of its parcel and courier products to the detriment of UPS, who is seeking a substantial sum of money from the government ($213 million) and other remedies.

In November 2002, the NAFTA tribunal investigating UPS's complaint ruled that the arbitration panel has jurisdiction to deal with some but not all parts of the complaint. The tribunal confirmed that it is only Section 11 that allows investor-to-state arbitration. Violations of NAFTA as a whole only allow for state-to-state arbitration. Therefore, the tribunal did not take jurisdiction to hear UPS allegations related to other parts of NAFTA, such as Section 15. It did take jurisdiction to hear allegations related to Section 11; specifically 11:02 National Treatment, which requires that international competitors be afforded the best treatment available to domestic competitors (such as Canada Post) in the non-monopoly postal services market. The November ruling

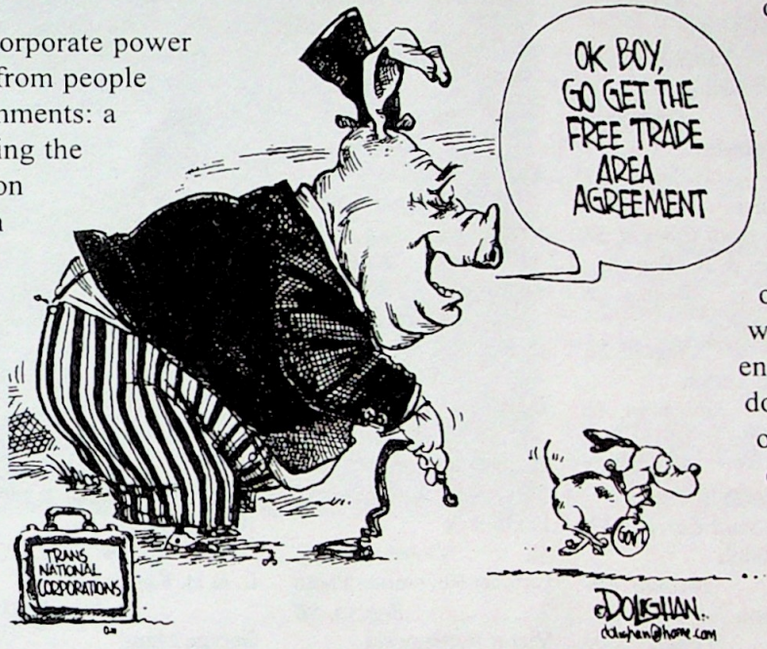
was a set -back for UPS, but it still kept the door open for arbitration on key issues which relate to the public infrastructure of Canada Post.

The NAFTA panel is set to begin its closed hearing late this year in Washington, with the panel chairperson coming from New Zealand.

Big Picture

The much larger issue is, of course, the existence of NAFTA and the adverse impact it has had and will continue to have on the ability of governments to act in the public interest on economic, social and environmental issues.

NAFTA expands corporate power and takes away power from people and their elected governments: a Chapter 11 case involving the USA's Ethyl Corporation prevented the Canadian government from banning MMT (a gasoline additive) for reasons related to public health, and Mexico was ordered to pay compensation under Chapter 11 to USA based Metalclad Corporation after a municipality denied them the use of an environmentally sensitive site for pumping toxic waste.



Canada has an immense territory and a modest population. To meet this challenge Canadians have invested in a network of postal facilities that cover the entire country. This postal system is subject to political oversight and democratic direction. The Parliament of Canada gave Canada Post a broad public interest mandate. This mandate includes beneficial services to Canadians, many of which fall outside the reserved area of addressed letter mail. This was done in recognition of the fact that our national postal service required a broad mandate to be socially relevant, financially viable and, above all, capable of providing affordable high quality postal and related services to the public.

One of the pillars of the postal service in Canada is the requirement by law to maintain services that are comparable for communities of the same size. This is driven by high community and public expectations for uniform postal service. Although not legally mandated, it is entrenched in the postal system that there are the same postal rates in every part of the country, be it urban or rural.

UPS, which dominates a coalition of courier companies under the umbrella of the Canadian Courier Association, has being pushing for postal reforms, which involves deregulation. Their key objective has been to have the government remove Canada Post from the courier and parcel business. Successive federal governments have rejected this vision for Canada Post, where it would be left to survive on a declining volume of letter mail. A more balanced policy has remained in place which allows the post office to remain financially stable while pursuing a broader public service mandate.

In a liberal democracy, it is expected that there will be fair and open debate on different, competing visions of public services. However, what we see taking place is an end run around the process for domestic policy reform objectives through secretive, extra-parliamentary means. Rebuffed in open public debate, the courier industry has turned to trade litigation and closed door negotiations to side-step our public policy making processes.

The Struggle Continues

In the 1980s and 90s, CUPW members had to fight against an attempt by the federal government to reduce the level of postal service and privatize parts of the postal service as part of their cheap labour strategy. In recent years, CUPW has succeeded in turning things around so that we are presently contracting back in the parcel work that was contracted out. This past January we saw 6000 rural and suburban contractors hired as employees with a first collective agreement which will increase their wages and benefits in the future. The CUPW is committed to preserving and improving the national postal service and the decent jobs it provides in every town and city in Canada.

Our government must know that any adverse decision or settlement will not be accepted by postal workers and the public.

Keith Jeworski is president of the Regina local of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

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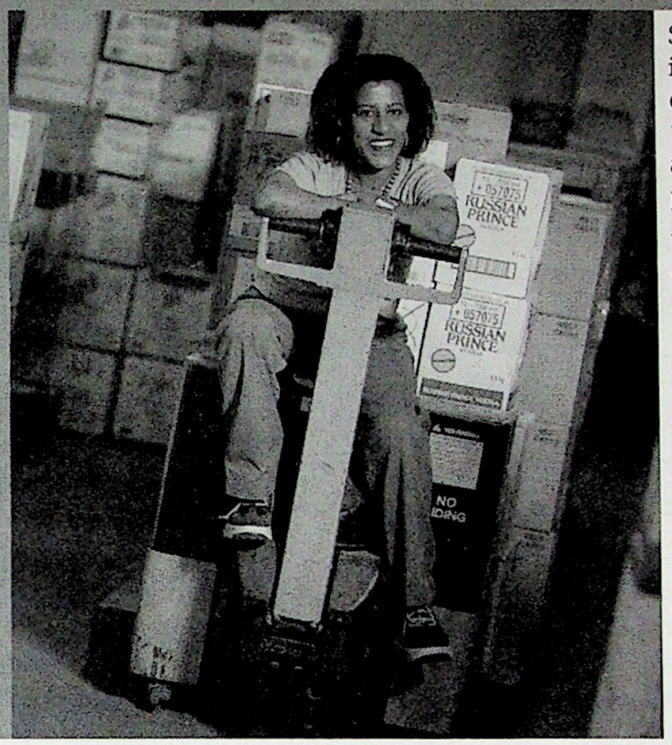
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Same-Sex Marriage:
The Personal and the Political

by Kathleen A. Lahey & Kevin Alderson
Insomniac Press, 2004.
www.insomniacpress.com

Book Review



reviewed by Chelsea Looysen

The legal recognition of same-sex marriage is a result of decades of work done by gay rights activists. This book provides in depth analysis of the history of the struggles.

The challenge of social acceptance of same-sex marriage rests on the assumption that the legal definition of marriage has always been exclusively heterosexual. This book sheds light on how the feminists' achievement of replacing sexist terms in our laws in the 70s resulted in the addition of language that explicitly excluded same-sex couples.

This book also shows the crucial role the courts have played in the achievements made in this struggle, "if it were not for equality guarantees in the constitutions of many of the USA's states, Canada and the Netherlands, same-sex couples would still be at the mercy of the prejudices of elected politicians."

The second part of this book reveals the experiences of 16 gay couples who provide insight into their lives as parents, activists, married partners and as members of society. Many of these couples have made history by being among the first couples to legally marry in their country or state, or have travelled great distances to marry in Canada. One couple travelled from Hong Kong to get married in Toronto and they are now beginning a legal challenge to have their marriage recognized in Hong Kong. Each couple has an earth-shattering story to tell. The interviews achieve the authors' goals of revealing the human phenomenon of same-sex marriage. This book is a first in many ways and it is a must-read for every activist, parent, gay man, lesbian and ally!

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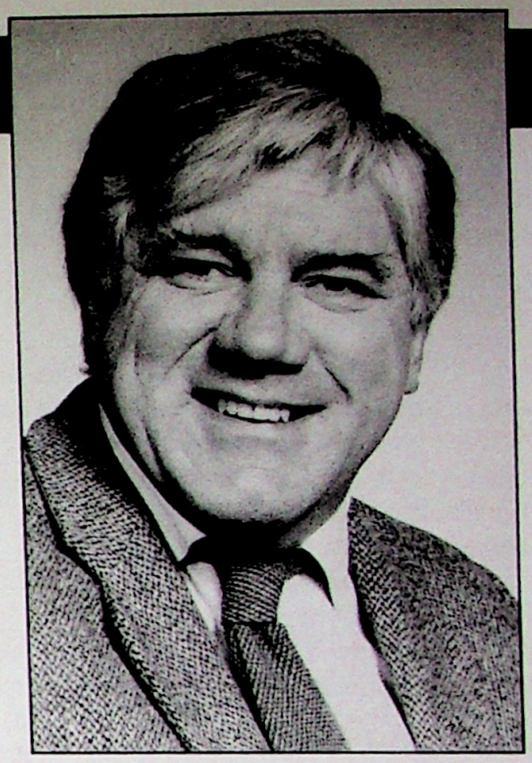
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Confusion versus Sleaze



by John F. Conway

> "It seems like the NDP wrote their campaign platform on an Etch-A-Sketch."
> - SaskParty Opposition Leader, Brad Wall
>
> "The only way Brad Wall can get into the press is to ride on the backs of suffering people."
> - NDP Health Minister, John Nilson

The two words capturing the essence of the current state of Saskatchewan politics are confusion and sleaze. First, the politics of confusion. The Calvert government seems rudderless, stumbling around looking for an agenda.

The consensus around the provincial budget - right, left and centre; business and labour - is that the government seems to have no clear plan, appearing uncertain about the meaning of its electoral mandate. Is the Calvert government fish or fowl? Is it a moderate social democratic government prepared to move forward on its strong popular vote mandate? Or is it merely a re-tread of the moderately neo-conservative government of Roy Romanow? The budget was full of this confusion. There were clear neo-conservative elements: an increase in the regressive PST; a public sector wage increase guideline - zero, one and one percent over three years - revealing a determination to solve the province's fiscal problems on the backs of the working class in the public sector; growing confrontations with labour, a recently settled SIAST strike and a looming strike at SaskPower. There was also the cut of 500 government jobs, the failure to reverse the unsustainable tax cuts the Romanow era granted business and high-income earners, and the refusal to raise more revenues from the province's resources.

But there were a few snippets of traditional social democracy. Health spending was increased 6.3 percent, education by 3.8 percent. The Crowns were re-organized and the Calvert government seems to be preparing some major initiatives in this sector. The cuts in government jobs were focussed on over-serviced rural areas, a legacy of Devine and Romanow.

So, just where is the government going?

Then there were the stupidities that further confused everyone: certain provincial parks would have their openings delayed, then they wouldn't; the premier said we should look at health premiums, then he said we shouldn't.

Such stumbling confusion leads to the conclusion that the Calvert government perhaps didn't expect to win the last election, focusing instead on maintaing a strong opposition to a SaskParty government. Thus it would now be a SaskParty government dealing with the economic difficulties, growing labour unrest, and a deepening health care crisis. Such a scenario is certainly consistent with what has happened: the Calvert

government is clearly undecided on a clear agenda. Perhaps, then, the recent budget can be seen as a holding action while Calvert gets his ducks in a row and waits, hopefully, for an economic upturn, more federal dollars for health, and an improved equalization formula as promised by Goodale and Martin. In the meantime, Calvert's traditional political base is restive, confused, and increasingly annoyed.

Calvert's ace in the hole is Brad Wall and the SaskParty. If the NDP is suffering from confusion, perhaps even a bit of political dementia, Brad Wall and the SaskParty are wallowing in the politics of sleaze. Unwilling to come clean and bravely advocate his right-wing agenda, Brad Wall has paraded victim after victim of the failure of the health care system, putting them on public display to score political points. Not satisfied with that, the SaskParty has used the tragic murder of Janice Kinna - a victim of the Regina police's failure to respond quickly to a 911 call - to score more political points, laying the blame for the murder on the NDP government.

What's next? There's a rumour that the NDP government might cut education funding for special needs programs, an indefensible action that needs to be denounced. But will Brad Wall begin to parade kids with learning, physical and behavioural difficulties before the cameras at the legislature? Or victims of traffic accidents? Or sexual assaults? If Brad Wall believes this kind of politics will win the next election, he needs both a therapist and a tutor.

Then there was the Serby betrayal. Brad Wall promised that the SaskParty would not exploit deputy premier Clay Serby's absence from the legislature as he battled cancer. In one of the sleaziest reversals in Saskatchewan political history, Brad Wall and the SaskParty consistently exploited Serby's absence in a zealous determination to defeat the government. Though the NDP won a strong popular vote mandate, they only won 30 seats to the SaskParty's 28. With the appointment of a Speaker, that gave the NDP a one-seat edge, 29 to 28. With Serby gone the legislature was deadlocked 28 to 28. The SaskParty exploited the situation to force the budget to be examined in committee of the whole legislature, despite having agreed earlier to examinations in smaller committees. According to British parliamentary tradition the Speaker only breaks ties in favour of the government when it is a matter of confidence and defeat will force an election. Therefore, the legislature was in effect deadlocked on routine business. Wall desperately sought an opportunity to bring down the government to force an election. Serby's recent return to the Legislature has put an end to Wall's dream.

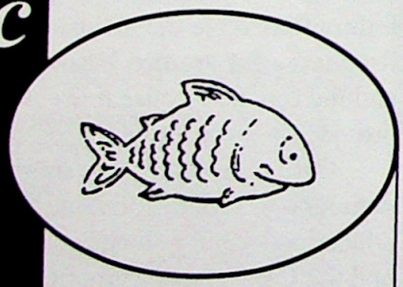
If the NDP expected to lose the last election, the SaskParty expected to win and have behaved as if they were entitled to win it ever since. Wall is convinced that they could win if an election was forced. They are probably wrong about that, and the public was not impressed with the sleazy exploitation of Serby's illness. But Brad Wall and the SaskParty are truly blindly obsessed, as visions of power tantalize them into acts of stupidity.

Another fatal flaw in Wall's approach is his knee-jerk support for every rural lamentation that emerges. We should once again bankrupt the province, as Wall's role model Grant Devine did, to sustain an unsustainable rural Saskatchewan: pour more money, without strings, into the pockets of farmers; give farmers an exemption from paying a fair share of education costs via property taxes; keep empty hospitals open and staffed; keep underused provincial government offices open and underused services staffed. We certainly need a plan for the rural economy and social structure, but that plan cannot be the SaskParty plan of pouring money into the bottomless pit of a rural society already in decline, nor giving every special interest in rural Saskatchewan the money they ask for.

My advice to the NDP: end the confusion, come clean, get clear, and crab left. My advice to Brad Wall: clean up your act, go back to the drawing board.

John Conway is a university of Regina political sociologist and the author of The West: The History of a Region in Confederation.

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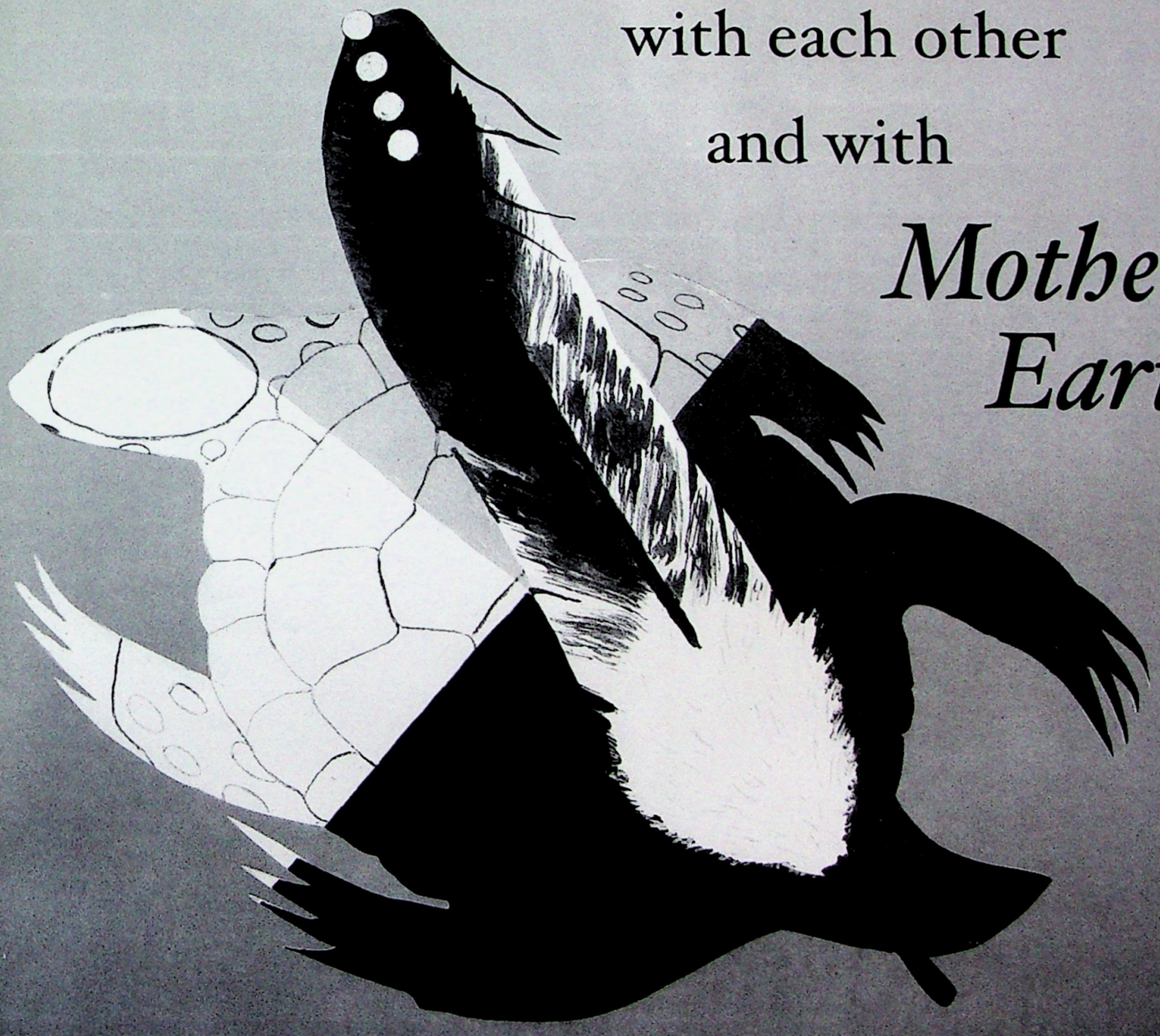


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CUT LONG-TERM BEDS?



Did you know?

- The percentage of people aged 80 and over in Saskatchewan has increased by 32% over the last decade.
- The number of publicly funded long-term care beds in Saskatchewan has dropped by 8.4% since 1996, while the number of private-for-profit long-term care beds has increased by 63%.
- Saskatchewan's per capita spending on home care is the third lowest in the country at $86. Manitoba spends $153.
- Saskatchewan needs more long-term care beds. Why? Because nearly two-thirds (62%) of long-term care residents in Saskatchewan suffer from dementia – much higher than other provinces. Saskatchewan also has the highest rates of MS in the country.

SAY NO TO CALVERT'S PLAN

The Calvert government plans to reduce the number of publicly funded long-term care beds in the province – unless the public speaks out.

TELL THE CALVERT GOVERNMENT TO EXPAND NOT CUT PUBLIC LONG-TERM CARE BEDS.

Premier Calvert
787-9433 (phone)
787-0885 (fax)
e-mail: premier@gov.sk.ca

Health Minister Nilson
787-7345 (phone)
787-8677 (fax)
e-mail: minister@health.gov.sk.ca

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